THE SHAKESPEARE BOOKS OF LORE

Being FIVE VOLUMES Full of *Excellent Learning*

About the POET and PLAYWRIGHT

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

by ARLENE STIEBEL, PH. D.

For the Study and Enjoyment of All

1. THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE
2. THEORIES ABOUT SHAKESPEARE
3. THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE
4. SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLISH
5. SHAKESPEARE'S POETRY

THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born in April 1564, the third child and eldest son of John and Mary Arden Shakespeare. He was one of six surviving children born to the prosperous family in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon. John Shakespeare, a glovemaker and merchant, was an important civic leader, and at one time was Bailiff, an office equivalent to Mayor. Mary was the daughter of a well to do family from Wilmcote, nearby. Although William's exact birth date is unknown, it is usually considered to be April 23rd, since the church registry shows that he was baptised on April 26th, and it was customary for children to receive baptism when they were three days old.

In 1582, when he was eighteen and she was twenty-five, William wed Anne Hathaway, and six months later their daughter, Susanna was born. There was nothing unusual about this timing in those days. Marriage was considered a series of events including betrothal, wedding and consummation, and the engagement of a couple usually meant that a sexual relationship between them was acceptable. That is why a broken engagement had such serious consequences for the female. If she were left at the altar, it could reasonably be assumed that she was "damaged goods," and no other man would want her. For a man, the greatest social disgrace was being born of an unwed mother, or "illegitimate," which meant that he could not inherit his father's property. Legally, the father of a child was the person to whom the mother was married at the time of the child's birth, whether he was responsible for the pregnancy or not. So William and Anne were merely following custom, and their marriage was well within the bounds of social propriety.

They lived with John Shakespeare's family, and two years later, in 1585, the couple had twins, Hamnet and Judith. Of Shakespeare's three children, Susanna and Judith lived to have children of their own, but the boy Hamnet died when he was eleven years old in 1596. There are no known descendants of William's grandchildren.

Little more is known of Shakespeare's early life in Stratford than public records provide. Our real knowledge about Shakespeare coincides with his appearance in London in 1592, at a time when the English theatre was just getting under way. The first structure purposely built for play acting was The Theatre in London in 1576. Next was the Curtain, nearby, and then The Rose, which was the first playhouse outside the city, across the Thames. The first recorded performance of a play by Shakespeare is *Henry VI* on March 3, 1592 at The Rose.

In 1593 the theatres were closed by the plague, and in that year Shakespeare made his name as a poet with the publication of *Venus and Adonis* . In 1594, the year the theatres reopened, he published *The Rape of Lucrece* . His reputation as a respectable author was made. Both those poems were dedicated to his patron, Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, and there is speculation that Shakespeare's sonnets, printed in 1609, are dedicated to him as well.

Shakespeare was a member of the company of players first known as Lord Strange's Men, who reorganized in 1594 as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a title they kept during the lifetime of the Queen. When James I came to the throne of England in 1604, they were taken under his

patronage and became The King' s Men. Among the company were the fine dramatic actor, Richard Burbage, and the well-known clown, Will Kempe, who played many of Shakespeare' s Fools. Later the more sophisticated Robert Armin took over the Fool' s roles. Shakespeare himself is said to have played Old Adam in *As You Like It* and the Ghost of Hamlet' s father.

Shakespeare' s plays were very popular, and the company flourished. A partner in the Lord Chamberlain' s Men, Shakespeare invested his profits in land in and around his native Stratford. Although William had gone to London while Anne and the children remained in Stratford, London was not far away, and Shakespeare kept up close family ties. In 1597 he purchased New Place, the home in Stratford to which he gradually retired.

In 1599, The Lord Chamberlain' s Men built the theatre with which Shakespeare is most closely associated, the Globe. He was the company' s most popular playwright, and Shakespeare' s plays were acted there to great success. As an actor, a writer and a shareholder in the property, he received a good portion of the earnings. The first Globe Theatre burned to the ground in 1613 when some wadding from a cannon used in *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare' s last play, started a blaze in the thatch. By the end of that year, Shakespeare, who, from 1610 on had been curtailing his writing and extending his time in Stratford, was living full time at New Place.

William Shakespeare died on his presumed birthday at home in Stratford on April 23, 1616. He is buried in Holy Trinity Church, where he had been baptised 52 years before.

THEORIES ABOUT SHAKESPEARE

There are more myths about Shakespeare than perhaps any other author of plays. This is probably because there is more written about Shakespeare than any other author, and translations of his works appear throughout the world. He has continued to be the most popular playwright in English since his great lifetime success.

Most of the stories about Shakespeare are impossible to verify, like the one about how he had to leave home because he poached deer, or about how he must have gone to sea because he used so many nautical images. It is true that Shakespeare wrote authentically about sailing, but knowledge of the sea would have been routine for almost any Englishman of his day. England is an island, so much of the population knew the ocean quite well. Further, the sixteenth century was a great period of commerce and exploration by sea, and it is during this time that the English became a great naval power with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. So any theories about Shakespeare' s service aboard a ship being responsible for his writing about the ocean are inconclusive. Yet, they cannot be eliminated entirely, just as we really don' t know if he hunted deer illegally on Sir Thomas Lucy' s estate.

Other stories, however, can be sensibly dismissed. Perhaps the most famous of the theories

about Shakespeare is the question of his plays' authorship. At one time or another, most people have heard the idea that Shakespeare really didn't write his plays. The reasons usually given for this are that no one man could have written so many great plays -- more than one person had to have written them. Or, that Shakespeare was a commoner, and so was not sufficiently educated to have written them. Or, that Shakespeare was not at court, so how could he know about court life. All of these arguments, interesting as they may be, are without merit. Most reputable scholars agree that there is overwhelming historical evidence that there was such a man as William Shakespeare and that he wrote the plays that are attributed to him.

First, we have the testimony of people who lived during the time. Shakespeare was a public figure, and very well known in both London and Stratford. Not only are there public records and diaries, but when Shakespeare's works were first published, the editors were his friends and fellow actors, who knew him very well. Even rival playwrights, like Ben Jonson, praised Shakespeare's artistry. Then there is what scholars call the "internal evidence" or writing style of his plays. A thorough study of the texts reveals certain characteristics that are only Shakespeare's, and his plays have these identifiable elements. Finally, the claim that only a nobleman, like Francis Bacon or the Earl of Oxford, could have written Shakespeare's plays can be traced to a jealous competition for audiences among acting companies of Shakespeare's day.

Most playwrights who preceded or wrote at the same time as Shakespeare were highly educated noblemen, who had gone to one of England's two universities, Cambridge and Oxford. Shakespeare was a well-educated commoner, which meant that he did not have advanced study, but he did have a great deal of schooling. In Stratford, he would have attended grammar school, "grammar" at that time meaning "Latin" grammar, and been taught such subjects as Latin, Greek, logic and rhetoric as well as more generalized studies through a rigorous discipline of drill and memorization.

Other playwrights, called the "university wits," used the theatre to exercise their intellect. They were forever using difficult allusions or sophisticated references in their plays. Shakespeare, on the other hand, used very few learned expressions in his plays. This led to the criticism that he "wrote for the groundlings," which meant that he appealed to the lowest class in the audience. His popular appeal resulted in his company drawing a large audience. Some of the higher class playwrights resented the success of this man from the country who had not been to college. At first they said that whatever he wrote wasn't worth writing. Then, when it was clear that his plays were worthwhile, they said that he could not have written them. Eventually the criticism ceased, the rivalry became a friendly competition, and Shakespeare was accorded the credit for his writing and acting that everyone knew he really deserved. Shakespeare became the single most popular and financially successful playwright of his day.

After theatrical styles in England had changed, and everyone who had been alive during Shakespeare's time was gone from the stage, some new critics picked up on the authorship controversy. The idea that Shakespeare didn't write his plays resurfaced, becoming the basis for doubt even today among some people who believe that only a nobleman could be the author of such fine works.

THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Shakespeare was writing, "publication" and "printing" were not the same thing. To "publish" something simply meant to make it available to the public. Since printing was expensive and time-consuming, most serious works of literature were passed around among friends in manuscripts before they were ever printed. This was considered making your work public. Therefore, some writings considered "published" never made it to the printer, and survive only in manuscript. On the other hand, an example of "private" writing would be letters to a particular individual or a personal diary not commonly shared.

Plays were public by definition. They were not thought of as literary works for the educated, but theatrical entertainments to which everybody came. Sometimes plays were thought of as frivolous, and not worth the time and expense of printing, but more often there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the acting companies to keep their scripts to themselves. In those days, there were no copyrights, so because the players depended on attendance for their living, scripts were carefully guarded. If some other company got hold of the text of your play, they could perform it and steal your audience. To prevent plagiarism, information about a work to be printed would be made as an entry in a book called the *Stationers' Register* , which conveyed a kind of patent on a title, but the text itself was not part of the entry. Sometimes "blocking entries" were made, not to register the printing of a work, but to prevent it, so the script would not be available publicly.

Despite the actors' attempts to keep scripts from the public, Shakespeare' s audiences had well developed memories, sometimes saw the same play more than once, and might be able to quote extensively from the performances they attended. Pirated editions of popular plays, such as the 1603 quarto of *Hamlet* , were common. After a play had been around for a while, it might as well be printed, especially if it had been popular. Then the edition might sell out, and there could be several reprintings. It is difficult, then, to determine the exact dates of composition for Shakespeare' s plays, since they could have been performed for some time before they were printed, and they might have been revised. Also, we do not have any authorized editions of Shakespeare' s plays nor do we have any of his manuscripts. We have numerous versions of some plays, and only one of others. Therefore, the accuracy of a text for any given play depends on its performance and printing history, and some texts are more authentic than others.

In contrast to plays, non-dramatic poetry was considered serious literature. Shakespeare' s poems all appeared during his lifetime in authorized printings, and we have reliable texts for them all.

Here is a list of Shakespeare' s works according to what most scholars agree is the probable order of composition and performance, with the dates of the first printed versions as we know

them.

PLAYS

Henry VI, Part 1, first printed in the Folio, 1623.
Henry VI, Part 2, first printed in 1594.
Henry VI, Part 3, first printed in 1595.
All three parts were probably written in 1591-92. Philip Henslowe notes in his diary a performance of ' harey the vj' on March 3, 1592.

Richard III, probably written in 1592-3. Entered in the Stationers' Register on October 20, 1597 and first printed as a quarto in the same year.

The Comedy of Errors, probably written in 1592-93. Entered in the Stationers' Register June 10, 1594 and first printed in 1595.

Titus Andronicus, probably first acted between December 27, 1593 and February 6, 1594. Henslowe' s diary records a performance on January 23, 1594. First printed as a quarto on February 6, 1594.

The Taming of the Shrew, probably written around 1593 or 1594. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Two Gentlemen of Verona, probably written around 1593 or 1594. Mentioned by Meres in his book *Palladis Tamia* in 1598. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Love's Labour's Lost, probably written in 1593 or 1594. First printed in 1598.

Richard II, probably written in 1594 or 1595. Entered in the Stationers' Register on August 29, 1597 and printed in a quarto that same year.

Romeo and Juliet, probably written in 1594 or 1595. First printed in a quarto in 1597.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, probably written late in 1594 or 1595. Entered in the Stationers' Register on October 8, 1600 and printed in the same year.

King John, probably written in 1595 or 1596. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

The Merchant of Venice, probably written in 1595 or 1596. Entered in the Stationers' Register on July 22, 1598, and first printed in a quarto in 1600.

Henry IV, Part 1, probably written in the autumn of 1597. Entered in the Stationers' Register on February 26, 1598 and printed in the same year.

Henry IV, Part 2, probably written in the spring of 1598. Entered in the Stationers' Register for publication on August 23, 1600. A quarto was printed in the same year.

Much Ado About Nothing, probably written in 1598. Entered in the Stationers' Register for printing on August 23, 1600 and printed in a quarto that same year.

Henry V, probably written in the spring of 1599. Printed in a pirated edition in 1600, but first printed in full in the Folio, 1623.

As You Like It, probably written after June, 1599. Recorded in the Stationers' Register on August 4, 1600. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Julius Caesar, written in 1599; a performance is recorded on September 21, 1599 in the diary of a German traveler, Thomas Platter. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

The Merry Wives of Windsor, probably written by the end of 1599. First entered in the Stationers' Register for publication as a quarto in January 1602.

Twelfth Night, probably written in 1600 or 1601. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Hamlet, probably written in 1600 or 1601. Entered in the Stationers' Register on July 26, 1602. Printed in a pirated quarto 1603. Printed in an "authorized" edition in 1604.

Troilus and Cressida, entered in the Stationers' Register on February 7, 1603. Printed in a quarto in 1609.

All' s Well That Ends Well, probably written between 1601 and 1604. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Othello, probably written in 1602. Noted as played before King James I on November 1, 1604 in the Court Accounts. First printed in a quarto in 1622.

Measure for Measure, noted as played before the Court of King James on December 26, 1604. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

King Lear, noted as acted before King James on December 26, 1606. First printed in a quarto in 1608.

Macbeth, probably written in 1606. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Anthony and Cleopatra, probably written in 1607 or 1608. Entered in the Stationers' Register on May 20, 1608. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Coriolanus, probably written between 1607 and 1609. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Timon of Athens, probably written between 1606 and 1609. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Pericles, Prince of Tyre, entered in the Stationers' Register on May 20, 1608. First printed in a quarto in 1609. This is the only play now considered among Shakespeare' s works which was not printed in the first Folio, 1623 and the second Folio, 1632. The play is, however, included

in the third Folio of 1664.

Cymbeline, probably written in 1610. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

The Winter's Tale, probably written in 1610 or 1611. Described as performed at the Globe on May 15, 1611 by a spectator, Dr. Simon Forman. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

The Tempest, probably written in 1611. Noted in the Revels Accounts as performed before King James I on November 1, 1611. First printed in the Folio, 1623.

Henry VIII, acted as a new play at the Globe on June 16, 1613. First printed in the Folio, 1623. During the performance on June 29, 1613, the firing of a cannon set the thatch roof on fire and burned the Globe theater to the ground.

SHAKESPEARE'S POEMS in the order they were printed.

Venus and Adonis, entered in the Stationers' Register on April 18, 1593 and published soon after. A very popular poem, it made Shakespeare's reputation, and went through many reprintings.

The Rape of Lucrece, entered in the Stationers' Register on May 9, 1594 and published soon after. It was very popular and reprinted often.

The Passionate Pilgrim, printed without entry in the Stationers' Register, in 1599. Although his name is on the title page, not all the poems are by Shakespeare.

The Phoenix and the Turtle, printed in 1601 as part of a book by prominent poets of the day entitled *Love's Martyr*.

The Sonnets were entered in the Stationers' Register on May 20, 1609 and printed that same year. There is conjecture, however, that some of the poems had been written as early as eleven years before and privately passed around in manuscript among Shakespeare's friends.

A Lover's Complaint was printed as an appendix to the sonnets in 1609.

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS BY CATEGORY AS THEY APPEAR IN THE TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE FIRST FOLIO, 1623.

COMEDIES
The Tempest
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
The Merry Wives of Windsor
Measure for Measure
The Comedy of Errors
Much Ado About Nothing
Love's Labour's Lost
A Midsummer Night's Dream

The Merchant of Venice
As You Like It
The Taming of the Shrew
All' s Well That Ends Well
Twelfth Night, Or What You Will
The Winter' s Tale

HISTORIES
The Life and Death of King John
The Life and Death of Richard the Second
The First Part of King Henry the Fourth
The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth
The Life of King Henry the Fifth
The First Part of King Henry the Sixth
The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth
The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth
The Life and Death of Richard the Third
The Life of King Henry the Eighth

TRAGEDIES
The Tragedy of Coriolanus
Titus Andronicus
Romeo and Juliet
Timon of Athens
The Life and Death of Julius Caesar
The Tragedy of Macbeth
The Tragedy of Hamlet
King Lear
Othello, the Moor of Venice
Anthony and Cleopatra
Cymbeline, King of Britain

Troilus and Cressida does not appear in the table of contents, and
Pericles, Prince of Tyre does not appear in the Folio of 1623.

SHAKESPEARE' SENGLISH

One of the most difficult aspects of Shakespeare for some modern readers is the language, which is very different from the English we speak today. We usually call this kind of early modern English "Elizabethan," after the Queen, although some of its most famous examples are in works published after her death in 1603, such as the later plays of Shakespeare and the King

James (or Authorized) Version of the Bible, published in 1611.

During the English Renaissance, eloquence, or the artistic use of language, was very important both for its own sake and as a sign of patriotism. Among the nobility, who lived off the income from their lands and were expected to serve the monarch at their own expense, international diplomacy required a thorough knowledge of the classical languages, Greek and Latin, as well as fluency in the contemporary vernaculars such as Italian, Spanish, and French. Add to that the study of the Old Testament in Hebrew, and you have some sense of the importance of language skills for the aristocracy. Queen Elizabeth herself was fluent in six ancient and modern languages, had published a translation from the Latin (Boethius' *Consolations of Philosophy*), and wrote poetry in English on the side.

The use of the vernacular, or local spoken language, for serious literature was one characteristic of the renaissance, literally "rebirth," of learning that occurred throughout Europe and England from the late fourteenth through the early seventeenth centuries. Up through the Middle Ages, important literary works, like important documents such as state papers, were all written in Latin, the international language, which also happened to be the language of the Roman Catholic Church. But in 1453, Constantinople was captured by the Turks, and the fleeing Byzantine monks brought with them classical manuscripts that had not been seen in Europe earlier. The availability of various Greek and Latin works in their original classical languages, in contrast to the contemporary spoken, or "demotic," Greek and "ecclesiastical," or Church, Latin, set off a fad of interest in classical learning for its own sake. The skillful use of languages, both ancient and modern, became the mark of a civilized man.

The Renaissance, then, was characterized by an interest in a new and particular kind of learning that included the study and development of written languages and speech arts as part of a group of topics called the humanities because they were designed to "humanize" a student, or make him a well-educated nobleman. Women, and most commoners, were not routinely educated and did not attend universities.

Part of the training of a gentleman was a schoolboy exercise they called "imitation and overgo." The task was for the student to take a piece of writing in a foreign language, translate it into English, and then to make another translation of it into the first language that was better than the original. The challenge to exceed the excellence of the classical original was part of a philosophy of chauvinism that characterized England in this period. The world thought of Greece and Rome as setting the standard for excellence, hence the concept of "classic" as the best. If the English could accomplish for their country what Greece and Rome had done for theirs, they would be first among nations, and that was their goal. One way to do this was to elevate their language, English, to the same importance that classical languages had. So they self-consciously set out to develop English as skillfully as they could.

Shakespeare' s language was intended to be spoken, so a good way to understand it is to say a speech out loud. Even though it may look different on the page, pronouncing a text frequently illustrates its relationship to contemporary usage. So performances of Shakespeare' s plays are usually very popular. Once you develop "an ear" for Shakespeare, the language becomes surprisingly accessible.

SHAKESPEARE' SPOETRY

Most of Shakespeare' s scripts are written in combinations of prose and poetry, with the poetry predominating. Of the many poetic forms that Shakespeare chose to use throughout his plays, the famous iambic pentameter line was what he used for many speeches and dialogue.

All speech in English is based on a combination of accent and syllable. In the dictionary, words are broken down into syllables and given little marks that show which syllables are to be accented. Even if you have never heard a word before, you could probably tell how it should be pronounced. In any spoken or written language, the built-in, or linguistic, stresses that you can identify from the dictionary affect the way the words are said. So most people do not mispronounce words they have heard or looked up. If we do put the accent on the wrong syllable, the word "sounds funny" to us. When poets put words into verse (or poetry), they intentionally pick words not only for meaning, but also for the combination of stressed and non-stressed syllables that the words form. In this way they can control the way the words are said and influence how the readers or actors perform the text.

In sixteenth century England, the most popular line of poetry for use in drama was a combination of ten alternating stressed and non-stressed syllables that fell into a pattern of five units called poetic feet. A foot is simply a unit of measure that contains both stressed and unstressed syllables. The pattern of stresses determines the name of the foot. For example, an "iambic" foot has a pattern of one unstressed followed by one stressed syllable, like the word "appear." In poetic notation, with "x" standing for unstressed and "/" standing for stressed, the foot looks like this: x / . If there are five of these feet strung together in one line, the line is called iambic pentameter, to show the kind of feet (iambic) and how many of them are counted before the line ends. "Penta" stands for five and "meter" means measure. So a line of iambic pentameter verse is a line of poetry that has five feet, each of which is made up of two syllables, with the accent on the second. In metrical notation it looks like this: x / x / x / x / x / . A famous line of poetry from *Romeo and Juliet* with that pattern is

```
      1     |      2       |       3       |    4     |      5

    x    /  |    x     /   |     x       /  | x    /  | x      /
 But soft   |  what light  | through yon|der  win|dow breaks.
```

Or this one from *Hamlet* :

```
    x     / | x    /     |   x   /  |    x       /   |    x    /
  The   la | dy    doth | protest |   too much, |  methinks.
```

Notice that words can be split up in measuring feet per line; only the syllables are counted, and

that pronunciation, not spelling, determines the syllable. You can see that the metrical accents fall in the proper place for these lines to be regular iambic pentameter. Not only was this kind of line popular in drama, but all sonnets are, by definition, made up of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter.

"Rhythm" in poetry is a combination of the way a word might be said normally and how it is said as part of the pattern of poetic meter. Some of the enjoyment of poetry, and the challenge for a Shakespearean actor, is to find ways to say the emphasized syllables that keep both pattern and variety, but not too much of one or the other. There are three customary ways to indicate accent in speech: volume, pitch and duration. You can get louder or softer, make your voice higher or lower, and speak more quickly or slower. Most of us use these techniques without thinking about it in everyday speech. If someone doesn' t, for example, we find it boring, or call them a "monotone."

From analyzing how he used particular poetic structures like iambic pentameter and other forms of poetry or prose to direct the delivery of his scripts, it is possible to determine how Shakespeare wanted his plays to be performed.

©1997 Arlene Stiebel, Ph.D. All Rights Reserved.